7: Thompson--372 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
116, 769, 771, 775, 779

"Along with the first migrations from the North and West into Laos filtered the Vedic precepts and the laws of Manu. From 900 to 700 B.C. the more militant dogmas of Brahmanism began to appear, at the same time as the ancestral cult and innumerable auxiliary superstitions. About the thirteenth century Buddhism began to appear by different routes, but it is the Ceylonese variety, albeit profoundly modified, which has the largest number of Laotian followers. Chiefly because it rejects study and examination, this doctrine permits many superstitions to live side by side with it, embedded at varying depths in the popular consciousness. The kind of Buddhism practised by the Laotians and some Khas is almost entirely excempt from philosophic speculation. Bonzes recite prayers incomprehensible to themselves and to the people, but they must mark every social event. These ceremonies, a reverential attitude towards sacred places, a dash of animism, the ancestral cult, and a belief in Kharma, make up official Laotian religion. Some of this has been absorbed by the Yaos and Lus, Khas and Meos, each of whom has added their own assortment of superstitions. Laotian superstitions, too, are myriad. They attribute all evils to spirits--none other than their ancestors, who take delight in returning to earth expressly to torment their relatives. Hence the great power of sorcerers, who, incidentally, are rent by the greatest professional jealousy. All of this, with a smattering of Christian converts, form an ill-defined, uneasy pantheism, quite congenial to the Laotian soul."

10: d'Orleans--276 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 563, 577, 775 Ethnic subgroups

"I do not know whether our boatmen [LSS: Kha boatmen, in the service of a Laotian] have followed any religious courses, but they do not seem to trouble themselves about the future. One of them first tells me that he does not know what will happen in the other life; then he adds that he believes he shall return to this world as a man, if he shows mercy during his lifetime, that is if he gives rice to the dogs and cats, or performs any other charitable actions;if not his soul will pass into the body of an animal."

10: d'Orleans--338 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 363, 775, 782

[LSS: in Luang Prabang] "Between the palace and the river bank a broad street runs parallel to the market, and at frequent intervals are jars containing water, placed there by the inhabitants, who believe that in so doing they are making sure of a reward hereafter."

10: d'Orleans--366 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 577, 775

"They themselves know little; they believe that charitable people will be recompensed, taking on another individuality after death, and that the wicked will go to hell. 'There are, however, at Luang Prabang,' they add, 'some men who do not believe in hell, who do not give to the bonzes, who drink tchoum-tchoum, and who smoke opium.'"

Khas

776 lay priests preside. These lay priests, or rather these servants of the
793 Spirits, correspond to the Guardians of the Genii in the Buddhist
755 religion. Usually they exercise their ministry only when one of their countrymen falls sick or dies.

"In case of a serious illness the servant of the Spirits goes to the sick person's house, goes to his side and recites a few prayers. Then he takes a bowl of uncooked rice on which he stands an egg with the smallest end upwards. With his right hand the officiant drops a certain number of grains of rice on the point of the egg, performing this operation three times in all. If the same number of grains of rice remain on the point of the egg each time, this means that a "Spirit" has entered the sick person's body.

787 "By means of similar maneuvers, the Spirit is then questioned to find out what he wants to eat. Depending on the answer, a buffalo, an ox or a pig may be killed. The designated animal is slaughtered and then scorched without being skinned so as to destroy the hairs which cover it. The entrails are taken out and carefully washed [154] in running water, then replaced in the animal's body. The victim is taken to the altar of the Spirits, which is located outside the village, and placed with its head towards the altar. Then prayers are said asking the Spirit to cure the sick person. When the ceremony is over the animal is taken back to the village, where it is cut into pieces and divided among all the inhabitants. The invalid rarely gets well.

"There are also sorcerers and witches among the Thais, who are consulted in circumstances of lesser importance.

• [775] "The Thais believe in metempsychosis, although their ideas on the subject are not very clear" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos). "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

771 Religion of the Khas. Among the Khas, even those who practice
782 Buddhism, the only existing religion is a religion of "Phis" which is
776 similar to the Thai belief in "Spirits, Genii and Demons." The outer manifestations of this cult consist of offerings of rice, flowers and fruit, but never include sacrifices of animals. Small shelters which affect the form of an ordinary house are built at the entrance to villages to receive propitiatory offerings destined for the "Phi".

the "Phi."

It is said that each of us has his good and his evil genie which are engaged in a constant struggle, and that we are good or evil according as the one or the other gains the upper hand. This is a kind of symbolism of good and evil, but here the controlling and guiding conscience is replaced by the influences of the moment, the occasion, the circumstances and the milieu.

Each house also has its own "genie", reminiscent of the Roman Lares, to which sacrifices and offerings are made on every possible occasion.

The evil "Phis" are more dreaded and receive a great many more offerings than the good "Phis," with whom no trouble need be taken.

In each village there is a sorcerer to explain the actions of the "Phis" and teach the way to gain their favor. Although consultations with them are not free of charge these sorcerers, who are called Mo-hou-ha, Mo-Phi or Phi-pop depending on the province, are just as [155] [Illustration] [156] [Blank page] [157] highly regarded as the "Guardians of the Genii" of the Buddhist religion and, like them, are exempt from servitude and taxes.

In times of epidemic all responsibility is attributed to the evil "Phis", and in order to make them take flight the men of the villages beat on the roofs of their houses with long bamboo poles until such time as the "Phis" are supposed to have disappeared.

The Khas have retained a belief in metempsychosis which is tinged with certain rather vague superstitions bearing on a future life and some kind of resurrection. But this second existence is not everyone's privilege, and will exist only insofar as one's life has been a good one.

They also believe in the existence of a place of torment where perjurers, murderers, etc. will remain for all eternity. To be sure, they believe in a general way that a new life will begin and that it will be a reward or a punishment for the individual's deeds in his last incarnation. Thus a brave and good man will return as a happy and respected chieftain. Others will be entitled only to an animal existence, the importance of which in the scale of being will be like a personification of their faults and merits. One odd fact is that women always want to return in the guise of a man.

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Religion of the Lus. The religion practiced by the Lus is a form of Buddhism which has been mitigated by certain local customs

771 and to which is added the pantheism of the "Phis." Their general
779 doctrine, however, includes a belief in an "element which creates all things" and in a future life, the sanction of their dogmatic taboos and precepts, in a place of eternal beatitude which it is possible to inhabit here on earth and which is, at bottom, nothing else but the annihilation of being in the "Nirvana" of the Buddhists.

Among the Lus, even more so than in China and the Indies, the basis of this mystical and dreamlike religion which is so well suited to their temperament is an idea of the nothingness of things, the uselessness of effort and even of action. It is, in a word, the most complete pessimism and the annihilation of energy and will.

• 775 Various beliefs. 1. The following is an incantation or prayer
769 for [158] dying persons which gives a good picture of the system of the world and of the idea of metempsychosis:
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The sky and the earth are growing dark:
Come out, souls, and gain "space":
The spirits of the parts of the body are joined together and form only one:
Listen to the law of Buddha:
We teach the road which leads to the kingdom of Buddha, the kingdom of the rising sun.
The one soul, the union of the spirits of the body, knows today that birth and death are alike:
What is birth?
Nothingness produces the generative breath.
The breath produces fire.
Fire produces water.
Water produces earth, mother of all beings.
Birth is produced by harmony and perfect equilibrium of the elements.
What is death?
Death is a return to the beginning by the reversal of causes.
Earth masters water.
Water masters fire.
Fire masters air.
Air masters nothingness.
Nothingness always remains nothingness.
Nothingness is infinite.

149: Reinach--118 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Death is produced by a lack of harmony and equilibrium among the elements.
Sympathy of the spirits produces a man.
Antipathy of the spirits produces a saint.
He who understands this can transform his nature and reach a point where he knows neither birth nor suffering nor death.
He will not know desire or grief!
He who, as he draws his last breath, repents of all his faults in deed, intention and thought regains his original purity. His soul goes to paradise so that, after "time" has passed, it may again be incarnated at the epoch of "rebirth" in the body of a good, just and happy man.

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2. We shall now give an extract from the work of Captain Gosselin, who gives a good definition of the spirits or souls in Laotian beliefs which are particular to each human organ and faculty. His description will be found to agree with what we have said at the beginning of this chapter.

[159] "The existence of man consists in the union of several organs, the cooperation of which helps to regularize the mechanism of vital formation. Over each of these organs presides an immortal personality which is called the soul of the organ. These souls, which are thirty-two in number, are as follows:

"The soul of hair on the head; the soul of body hair; the soul of the fingernails; the soul of the teeth; the soul of the skin; the soul of the flesh; the soul of the nerves; the soul of the bones; the soul of the cartilages; the soul of the glands; the soul of the heart; the soul of the spleen; the soul of the peritoneum; the soul of the liver; the soul of the lungs; the soul of the large intestine; the soul of the small intestine; the soul of digested food; the soul of food to be digested; and the soul of the brain.

"These twenty organs are produced by the male substances, that is to say by the father. The twelve others originate from female substances, or the mother. They are:

"The soul of the bile; the soul of glutinous matter; the soul of the synovia; the soul of the blood; the soul of the sweat; the soul of

774 foul-smelling matter; the soul of tears; the soul of liquid fat; the
827 soul of the saliva; the soul of matter secreted by the brain; the soul of the marrow; and the soul of the urine.

774 "The following must be added to the union of these organs for
828 the formation of a man;

"Consciousness, name, individuality, image and the faculty of memory.

[822] "The four fundamental elements--earth, air, water and fire.

"And finally the five moral faculties:

"The faculty of distinguishing; the faculty of reflection; the faculty of judgment; the faculty of thought; and the ideal faculty of the soul, which is the source of love of the beautiful.

774 "Man is formed of all these diverse elements.

"Immediately after death all these souls or faculties fly off into
775 the air like a swarm of bees, separate from one another, and each one follows the path indicated by destiny. Of those which have done good on earth, some go directly to heaven and are used in the formation of an angel, while the others are reborn again in our world where they help in the creation of a man who is to lead a happy life full of wealth and honor. Those souls or faculties, on the other hand, which have contributed to evil actions appear before the Phaya-Nhom-Phi-Bane, the king of the nether regions, who judges them immediately and condemns them to tortures which may be more or less cruel depending on their degree of guilt.

"Once dispersed these souls can no longer recognize one another if they should meet again. On their way they meet other souls which are wandering like themselves and come from other parts of the world, and by their union, if God so ordains, they form the elements necessary to the birth of another man.

"The absence of memory and the complete forgetfulness of what has happened before their dispersion prevent the souls which are used in the vital mechanism of new births [160] from having any consciousness of their past existences. On the other hand, physical and moral resemblances between persons of different blood are due to the combining of souls which belonged to various individuals" (1).

(1) Captain Gosselin, op. cit. [Le Laos et le Protectorat français, 1900.]

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Ever since the death, singers and improvisers of both sexes accompanied by volunteer musicians had recounted the merits, qualities and exploits of the deceased at great length and with emphasis before a numerous audience which remained attentive and never grew tired. They boasted of his good deeds, listed his particular habits and tastes and enumerated his many children and grandchildren.

They dwelled with great satisfaction on the intimacies which he had taken with the fair sex up to quite an advanced age, and in support of their remarks showed brightly illuminated drawings painted on long streamers of glazed calico. These drawings, as much by the truth of the attitudes shown as by their outrageous realism, were the joy of the spectators. Both children and adults roared with laughter as they listened to the highly spicy commentary of the improvisers.

A curious fact was that this exhibition did not occasion any obscene or even suggestive gesture on the part of the audience.

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The bonzes, who are the only art students in this country, are the ones who color these pictures. If published in our own land, the latter would certainly call down all the rigor of the law on their author.

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The day of cremation finally came, and the funeral proper began.

One of the sons of the deceased first set free two pairs of partridges and turtledoves, pet birds which he had had. The poor creatures were unaccustomed to flight and refused to leave their cage, but then beat their wings and clumsily escaped to a perch a few meters above ground on one of the trees [207] in the garden. A trail of ashes was spread all around the fence surrounding the house of the deceased in order, as popular belief has it, to prevent his spirit from escaping into the nearby region and tormenting the living.

[175]

A solid bamboo stretcher which twelve hardy men would carry on their shoulders was placed on the ground to await the catafalque. Attendance was heavy, and people of all ages came from a distance. They wore their holiday clothes with vivid, light and iridescent colors. They wore flowers in their ears and hair and carried multicolored streamers, wax candles and sticks of incense in their hands.

[292]

The members of the family, the officials of the Muong and the bonzes were also there in force.

The catafalque was carried from the house by hand and put down on the stretcher, which the porters then raised to their shoulders. At its base, near the feet of the deceased, was fastened a strip of calico

776 of one or several spirits who are reincarnated in one possessed. This
796 person enables the villagers and those living in the same quarter to
787 know the course of the new year and, if necessary, to improve it by means of gifts and prayers. During this time the village is forbidden to strangers (Lévy).

776 A series of particularly dangerous phi is also known; these are
• 775 the Phi Phetu (Sk: Preta), that is the wandering souls of people who have died in an abnormal way, by accident, suicide, childbirth for a woman, etc. These souls cannot be born again. They remain present in order to torment human beings. The Phi Houa Kout are
776 the headless phi, the Phi Khon Long are those who carry the coffins,
754 the Phi Pop have the power of entering into the body of a living human being. The unfortunate person then has the evil eye and is expelled from the village. In the region of Savannakhet, there is a village of victims of the Phi Pop which was created by a Protestant mission, in order to rescue these poor creatures who would otherwise die of hunger, for they are forbidden to enter any village.

The Phi Phong are the spirits of human beings who have studied the formulas to acquire magic powers but have not conformed strictly to certain rites prescribed by their studies. They are bloodthirsty and go out at night by the light of the fire [32] which issues from their nostrils along the banks of rivers and streams, and of ponds, to catch fish and toads. If one meets a Phi Phong, one must flee for he can spit in one's face, and then one may become a Phi Phong oneself.

776 The Phi Kong Koi lives in the mountains and has the shape of a monkey. During his existence on earth he was the servant of a Vietnamese. One day, having been too badly treated, he decided to escape. But in order not to be caught, he camouflaged his footprints by putting his heels in front and his toes behind. The Vietnamese, deceived by this trick, went off in the opposite direction
[198] and never found him. In our days when the Laotians want to chase away the Phi Kong Koi, the speak Vietnamese to each other. But if one is traveling in the mountains, one must refrain from lighting a fire or cooking any fish or meat or crabs, for the odor attracts the phi who wants to come and eat. His victim would have his intestines split open. The approach of the phi is always preceded by a violent storm and a torrential rain. There are said to be a great many Phi King Koi in the region of Samneua.

There is, however, another kind of Phi. This one seems to have a particular hatred for archaeologists. These are the phis who inhabit sculptures or the tumuli which are found in the bush [en brousse]. But that is another story...

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Then the royal retinue proceeds to the That Luang where the king must spend the night in a sala. He is accompanied by his ministers and in principle may not leave until they come and fetch him.

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On the morning of the fifteenth day, the king, carried by his guards, goes to make his offerings to the bonzes, and the whole day is devoted to public rejoicing, of which one form deserves to be mentioned. It is the game of the Thi khi.

Its origin, so far as we know at present, remains obscure. The Pra Lak Pra Lam tells us that Indra and Rama played Thi Khi together, and that since that day it has been played at Vientiane.

Let us observe that the game was unknown at Luang Prabang. It was imported from the south. Tradition required that it be played on horseback, when it was played like polo.

At the present time it is played on foot with a stick with the end bent over like a crosier and a ball the size [47] of a child's head and is similar to hockey. There are two opposing sides, the office-holders and the people. The latter should in principle win two victories out of three games. The game has no rules, there is no umpire and no limit to the ground played on. Sometimes the ball goes off into the shrubbery, and all the players go and look for it. Only a hypothetical line indicates the limit of the enemy side. [641]

The feasts of Vat Inpeng and of Vat Ong Tu merely repeat those of Vat Simuong and That Luang.

[48]

THE SECULAR CEREMONIES

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The Sou Khouan can be considered as the transition between the purely religious ceremonies and the secular feasts.

Actually Sou Khouan means "call and reception of the soul." The Laotian has a profound belief in the transmigration of the soul. According to him, the human body is inhabited by thirty-two khouan (spirits) each of whom presides over the function of a member, an organ or an intellectual faculty.

When a human being dies, all of the thirty-two souls leave his body. According to the merits which have been acquired, they go either to the heaven of the gods, or to the province of the dead. Certain beings who have died in an abnormal manner, by suicide, drowning, etc., become wandering souls. They are to be feared, because they return to earth in order to torment the living, and one must make numerous sacrifices to them.

•775 According to the normal cycle of rebirths, when they have ended their stay in Heaven and are on the point of returning to earth, they themselves choose their future parents.

All the thirty-two souls go and haunt the water jar of the adopted household. After the third night, at the moment when the future father comes for a drink, they insinuate themselves into the folds of the belt of his sarong. After remaining there for three nights they will enter the maternal womb by the natural passages at the time of conjugal intercourse.

755 782 When one of these wandering souls leaves the body in order to divert himself, the man becomes ill. In order to [49] cure him, the soul must be called back, and then the Sou Khouan is performed.

When the Sou Khouan is considered necessary, the master of the house goes and consults an achar (pronounced: atiar =sk. acarya), an aged bonze, for the choice of the ceremonial days and hours, where this achar will officiate.

When the prescribed moment arrives, the pha khouan (tray containing offerings) must be ready. In the center of the tray is a goblet artistically decorated with small flowering branches on which are attached tiny candles and white cotton threads about twenty centimeters long. Around this goblet are arranged a boiled hen's egg called khay khouan (egg offered to the spirits), some pellets of glutinous rice, cakes, and ripe bananas.

The tray and goblet may be of wood, copper or silver, the richest appearing at weddings. Instead of a single goblet, several of different sizes can be placed one on top of the other to form a pyramid, and be decorated with flowers, candles and cotton threads.

In addition to the eatables already mentioned, one can also place on the tray a ngeun fac (ancient silver coin in the shape of a parallelepiped weighing 225 grams) or some other precious object.

Next to this tray is placed a small one on which is set a yellow-clawed cock which has been plucked, drawn and boiled. This is the khay khouan (the cock offered to souls). In addition one can add the head and viscera of a boiled pig.

[273] The whole is completed with a bottle of [rice] alcohol and some glasses. In the olden days, the alcohol was contained in a small natural gourd, and the cups [50] were made of bamboo or wood. But rich people had porcelain utensils imported from China. The alcohol can be replaced by a jar of fermented glutinous rice, the liquid extract of which is drunk by sucking it through bamboo tubes dipped into the bottom of the jar.

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The person whose absent spirits are to be recalled sits next to the pha khouan, on the other side of which is the achar master of ceremonies facing him.

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In the case of a wedding, the bride and bridegroom each sits in front of his and her own pha khouan and achar, the young man being on the right of his affianced.

Those present, consisting of aged persons, notables, relatives, friends and acquaintances, sit around mostly behind the interested parties.

While the candles are lighted, the achar commences to recite the prayer.

After the litanies are ended, the oldest and most respected of the assembly begins a series of the phouk khene (fixing a thread to the wrist) starting with the achar. The latter extends his forearm horizontally, either his right or his left, bent at right angles and held near the elbow by the hand of another person in the gathering. The opposite hand must be held in the attitude of prayer in front of the face as if it were joined to the hand on the other side. The man who will tie the knot then grasps the white cotton thread by the middle, so that the two halves hang down. These he draws over the wrist which is held in both directions of the axis of the arm, in order to sweep away the kho, that is, the misfortunes sent as a punishment for former sins. Then he detaches from the extremity of each thread a little piece which he throws towards the setting sun, thus throwing the kho afar. He then takes the khay khouan, a [51] pellet of rice, a banana, and finally one of the precious objects contained in the pha khouan. These he places in the extended open hand to serve as an offering to the khouan, and brings the small tray containing the khay khouan closer in such a way that the back of this hand is in contact with that of the chicken. Finally, after tying the thread around the wrist, he grasps the loops of the knot between the thumb and the forefinger, and rolls them together for about a second, giving him time to finish the formula of good wishes which he has been murmuring since the beginning while accomplishing the gestures described above.

The symbolical knot tied to the wrist serves to hold the khouan who have just been attracted to it, and prevents them from wandering away again. One can take advantage of the opportunity to "tie the wrist" of anyone present, either as a sign of friendship or of hommage. [576]
At the close of the ceremony, which comes to an end without any more formalities, everyone is invited to a meal offered for the occasion.

764 coffin is placed on a truck. The bonzes are at the head of the procession, then the widow and the children dressed in white as a sign of mourning.

[60] The coffin is placed on the pyre. All those attending, holding a lighted candle or resinous torch, go to the pyre in single file, and throw the brands into the fire. It is forbidden to light a torch by lending one's light or by borrowing that of a neighbor. During this time the family must throw offerings to the crowd: pieces of banana branches, lemons, etc., into which have been introduced coins mixed with grilled rice. The cotton thread, called fay mongkhou, which [751] had surrounded the house in order to chase away sorrow, illness, the phi, etc., is removed at the end of the ceremony.

[187] On the third day the bones are fetched away. The bonzes are invited, but before touching the ashes, they must be examined to see [775] if they have left any imprints either animal or human, in order to know in what form the dead man will be reborn. The bones are gathered with wooden pincers and then placed in an urn. A statue in a vaguely human form is erected of wet cinders. The urn and the offerings are surrounded by a cotton thread, then the bonzes recite a prayer and this closes the ceremony. The urn will be placed in a pagoda or buried by the family who will erect a that. A little later, to commemorate the death of the departed, the family will dig a hole in the pagoda or near the that, and in it plant a long bamboo at the end of which is fastened a cotton banner laminated with small bamboo sticks. A tray of offerings is brought, which had been placed at the foot of the bamboo pole while it was being set up, and which is held by the relatives and friends of the dead man. Before this, offerings of food had been wrapped in a banana leaf. Once the bamboo is set up, water is poured all around on the earth which is holding it up, in the hope that the merits of this action will reach the other world. Then the whole family [61] squats down around the pole and with joined hands recites prayers.

The Laotian House.

342 It is built on piles and has a veranda. The roof is curved slightly upwards. A long stake holding the water jar is sunk in the ground near the veranda outside the house. The floor is of bamboo or of thin wide boards. The wall and ceiling are of bamboo panels, or of boards, or of mud. There are two principal doors and few windows. A partition going from the inner beam of the front gable separates the house lengthwise in two parts, most often of equal size. One is divided into